

a poem for my young friend, by using the citrons as a sweet bait.

With the air of a diplomatist charged with an important mission I went to him, and treated with him as one power with another, stipulating for an original poem in his own handwriting, as the price of the offered citrons. Goethe laughed at this joke, which he took in very good part, and immediately asked for the citrons, which he found excellent. A few hours afterwards, I was much surprised to see the following verses arrive as a Christmas present to my young friend :—

“That must be a land of bliss
Where the citrons grow like this!
And where ladies find employment
Sweetening them for our enjoyment,” &c.

When I saw him again he joked about the great advantages which he could now derive from his poetic profession, whereas in his youth he could not find a purchaser for his “Goetz von Berlichingen.” “I adopt your treaty of commerce,” said he; “when my citrons are eaten up do not forget to order some more; I will be punctual with my poetic payment.”

Tuesday, December 16, 1828.

I dined to-day with Goethe alone, in his work-room. We talked on various literary topics.

“The Germans,” said he, “cannot cease to be Philistines. They are now squabbling about some verses, which are printed both in Schiller’s works and mine, and fancy it is important to ascertain which really belong to Schiller and which to me; as if anything could be gained by the investigation—as if the

existence of the things were not enough. Friends, such as Schiller and I, intimate for years, with the same interests, in habits of daily intercourse, and under reciprocal obligations, live so completely into one another, that it is hardly possible to decide to which of the two the particular thoughts belong.

"We have made many distiches together; sometimes I gave the thought, and Schiller made the verse; sometimes the contrary was the case; sometimes he made one line, and I the other. What matters the mine and thine? One must be a thorough Philistine, indeed, to attach the slightest importance to the solution of such questions."

"Something similar," said I, "often happens in the literary world, when people, for instance, doubt the originality of this or that celebrated man, and seek to trace out the sources from whence he obtained his cultivation."

"That is very ridiculous," said Goethe; "we might as well question a strong man about the oxen, sheep, and swine, which he has eaten, and which have given him strength."

"We are indeed born with faculties; but we owe our development to a thousand influences of the great world, from which we appropriate to ourselves what we can and what is suitable to us. I owe much to the Greeks and French; I am infinitely indebted to Shakspeare, Sterne, and Goldsmith; but in saying this I do not show the sources of my culture; that would be an endless as well as an unnecessary task. What is important is to have a soul which loves truth, and receives it wherever it finds it.

“ Besides, the world is now so old, so many eminent men have lived and thought for thousands of years, that there is little new to be discovered or expressed. Even my theory of colours is not entirely new. Plato, Leonardo da Vinci, and many other excellent men, have before me found and expressed the same thing in a detached form ; my merit is, that I have found it also, that I have said it again, and that I have striven to bring the truth once more into a confused world.

“ The truth must be repeated over and over again, because error is repeatedly preached among us, not only by individuals, but by the masses. In periodicals and cyclopædias, in schools and universities ; everywhere, in fact, error prevails, and is quite easy in the feeling that it has a decided majority on its side.

“ Often, too, people teach truth and error together, and stick to the latter. Thus, a short time ago, I read in an English cyclopædia the doctrine of the origin of Blue. First came the correct view of Leonardo da Vinci, but then followed, as quietly as possible, the error of Newton, coupled with remarks that this was to be adhered to because it was the view generally adopted.”

I could not help laughing with surprise when I heard this. “ Every wax-taper,” I said, “ every illuminated cloud of smoke from the kitchen, that has anything dark behind it, every morning mist, when it lies before a steady spot, daily convinces me of the origin of blue colour, and makes me comprehend the blueness of the sky. What the Newtonians mean when they say that the air has the property of absorbing other colours, and of repelling blue alone, I

cannot at all understand, nor do I see what use or pleasure is to be derived from a doctrine in which all thought stands still, and all sound observation completely vanishes."

"My good innocent friend," said Goethe, "these people do not care a jot about thoughts and observations. They are satisfied if they have only words which they can pass as current, as was well shown, and not ill-expressed by my own Mephistophiles:—

"Mind, above all, you stick to words,
Thus through the safe gate you will go
Into the fane of certainty;
For when ideas begin to fail
A word will aptly serve your turn," &c.

Goethe recited this passage laughing, and seemed altogether in the best humour. "It is a good thing," said he, "that all is already in print, and I shall go on printing as long as I have anything to say against false doctrine, and those who disseminate it.

"We have now excellent men rising up in natural science," he continued, after a pause, "and I am glad to see them. Others begin well, but afterwards fall off; their predominating subjectivity leads them astray. Others, again, set too much value on facts, and collect an infinite number, by which nothing is proved. On the whole, there is a want of originating mind to penetrate back to the original phenomena, and master the particulars that make their appearance."

A short visit interrupted our discourse, but when we were again alone the conversation returned to poetry, and I told Goethe that I had of late been once more studying his little poems, and had dwelt especially

upon two of them, viz., the ballad* about the children and the old man, and the "Happy Couple" (*die glücklichen Gatten*).

"I myself set some value on these two poems," said Goethe, "although the German public have hitherto not been able to make much out of them."

"In the ballad," I said, "a very copious subject is brought into a very limited compass, by means of all sorts of poetical forms and artifices, among which I especially praise the expedient of making the old man tell the children's past history down to the point where the present moment comes in, and the rest is developed before our eyes."

"I carried the ballad a long time about in my head," said Goethe, "before I wrote it down. Whole years of reflection are comprised in it, and I made three or four trials before I could reduce it to its present shape."

"The poem of the 'Happy Couple,' continued Goethe, "is likewise rich in *motives*; whole landscapes and passages of human life appear in it, warmed by the sunlight of a charming spring sky, which is diffused over the whole."

"I have always liked that poem," said Goethe, "and I am glad that you have regarded it with particular interest. The ending of the whole pleasantry with a double christening is, I think, pretty enough."

We then came to the "Bürger-general" (Citizen-general); with respect to which I said that I had been lately reading this piece with an Englishman, and that we had both felt the strongest desire to see it repre-

* This poem is simply entitled "Ballade," and begins "Herein, O du Guter! du Alter herein!"—*Trans.*

sented on the stage. "As far as the spirit of the work is concerned," said I, "there is nothing antiquated about it; and with respect to the details of dramatic development, there is not a touch that does not seem designed for the stage."

"It was a very good piece in its time," said Goethe, "and caused us many a pleasant evening. It was, indeed, excellently cast, and had been so admirably studied that the dialogue moved along as glibly as possible. Malcomi played Märten, and nothing could be more perfect."

"The part of Schnaps," said I, "seems to me no less felicitous. Indeed, I should not think there were many better or more thankful parts in the *repertoire*. There is in this personage, as in the whole piece, a clearness, an actual presence, to the utmost extent that can be desired for a theatre. The scene where he comes in with the knapsack, and produces the things one after another, where he puts the *moustache* on Märten, and decks himself with the cap of liberty, uniform, and sword, is among the best."

"This scene," said Goethe, "used always to be very successful on our stage. Then the knapsack, with the articles in it, had really an historical existence. I found it in the time of the Revolution, on my travels along the French border, when the emigrants, on their flight, had passed through, and one of them might have lost it or thrown it away. The articles it contained were just the same as in the piece. I wrote the scene upon it, and the knapsack, with all its appurtenances, was always introduced, to the no small delight of our actors."

The question, whether the 'Bürger-general' could still be played with any interest or profit, was for a while the subject of our conversation.

Goethe then asked about my progress in French literature, and I told him that I still took up Voltaire from time to time, and that the great talent of this man gave me the purest delight.

"I still know but little of him," said I; "I keep to his short poems addressed to persons, which I read over and over again, and which I cannot lay aside."

"Indeed," said Goethe, "all is good which is written by so great a genius as Voltaire, though I cannot excuse all his profanity. But you are right to give so much time to those little poems addressed to persons; they are unquestionably among the most charming of his works. There is not a line which is not full of thought, clear, bright, and graceful."

"And we see," said I, "his relations to all the great and mighty of the world, and remark with pleasure the distinguished position taken by himself, inasmuch as he seems to feel himself equal to the highest, and we never find that any majesty can embarrass his free mind even for a moment."

"Yes," said Goethe, "he bore himself like a man of rank. And with all his freedom and audacity, he ever kept within the limits of strict propriety, which is, perhaps, saying still more. I may cite the Empress of Austria as an authority in such matters; she has repeatedly assured me, that in those poems of Voltaire's, there is no trace of crossing the line of *convenance*."

"Does your excellency," said I, "remember the short poem in which he makes to the Princess of

Prussia, afterwards Queen of Sweden, a pretty declaration of love, by saying that he dreamed of being elevated to the royal dignity?"

"It is one of his best," said Goethe, and he recited the lines—

"Je vous aimais, princesse, et j'osais vous le dire ;
Les Dieux à mon reveil ne m'ont pas tout oté,
Je n'ai perdu que mon empire."

"How pretty that is ! And never did poet have his talent so completely at command every moment as Voltaire. I remember an anecdote, when he had been for some time on a visit to Madame du Chatelet. Just as he was going away, and the carriage was standing at the door, he received a letter from a great number of young girls in a neighbouring convent, who wished to play the 'Death of Julius Cæsar' on the birth-day of their abbess, and begged him to write them a prologue. The case was too delicate for a refusal ; so Voltaire at once called for pen and paper, and wrote the desired prologue, standing, upon the mantel-piece. It is a poem of perhaps twenty lines, thoroughly digested, finished, perfectly suited to the occasion, and, in short, of the very best class."

"I am very desirous to read it," said I.

"I doubt," said Goethe, "whether you will find it in your collection. It has only lately come to light, and, indeed, he wrote hundreds of such poems, of which many may still be scattered about among private persons."

"I found of late, a passage in Lord Byron," said I, "from which I perceived with delight, that even Byron

had an extraordinary esteem for Voltaire. We may see in his works how much he liked to read, study, and make use of Voltaire."

"Byron," said Goethe, "knew too well where anything was to be got, and was too clever not to draw from this universal source of light."

The conversation then turned entirely upon Byron, and several of his works, and Goethe found occasion to repeat many of his former expressions of admiration for that great talent.

"To all that your Excellency says of Byron," said I, "I agree from the bottom of my heart ; but, however great and remarkable that poet may be as a talent, I very much doubt whether a decided gain for *pure human culture* is to be derived from his writings."

"There, I must contradict you," said Goethe ; "the audacity and grandeur of Byron must certainly tend towards culture. We should take care not to be always looking for it in the decidedly pure and moral. Everything that is great promotes cultivation as soon as we are aware of it."

(Sup.) Sunday, December 21, 1828.

Last night I had a strange dream, which I related to Goethe this evening, and which he thought very pleasant. I imagined myself in a foreign town, in a broad street, towards the south-east, where I stood with a crowd of men, and watched the heavens, which appeared covered with a light mist, and shone with the brightest yellow. Every one was full of expectation as to what would happen, when two fiery points appeared, which, like meteor stones, fell to the ground before us with a crash, not far from the spot where we